

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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Do Our Presidential Candidates Understand the Environment?

During the next eight months, we will be reading, watching or hearing presidential candidates express their position on various issues including the economy, foreign policy, education, energy, budget, healthcare, immigration, environment, and many others (<http://2012.presidential-candidates.org/>). Some of these are more important to you while other issues may be more important to other people. One of the more important issues should be the environment, and it would be nice to understand how each candidate looks at that issue.

Newt Gingrich has stated his position on climate change several times. In 2008, he supported an Al Gore ad by stating that “our country must take action to address climate change.” However, a few years later he repudiated the ad and argued against climate change. In 2007, he praised a cap-and-trade scheme that would cap the carbon emissions that could be similar to the successful trading system implemented for sulfur to curb acid rain. A few years later, he stated that he was against cap-and-trade and even voted against it. He also stated that he would close EPA and replace it with another agency that can work with industry. To get a better idea on how Gingrich views the environment, you could read his recent book, “A Contract with the Earth”. The book is filled with generalities and nebulous platitudes, and he really says nothing more than America should be a leader with respect to the environment.

Barack Obama has shown great concern for the environment in his various addresses to the American public. He has talked about the need for renewable energy like solar and wind. Money from his stimulus package went to some solar companies which took the money and opened its plants overseas. He is concerned with climate change, but the U.S. is now the only country in the world that did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol to reduce carbon emissions. Last year, additional funds were appropriated as farm subsidies for ethanol production, a process that requires more energy than it generates. Last month, Congress failed to extend the Production Tax Credit (PTC) for wind energy which means that many planned wind projects will not be initiated.

As recently as June 2011, Mitt Romney suggested that something must be done about climate change, but not cap-and-trade. He also stated that this warming of the planet is caused by human activity. But four months later, Romney stated: “My view is that we don’t know what’s causing climate change on this planet. And the idea of spending trillions and trillions of dollars to try to reduce CO2 emissions is not the right course for us.” Although the Supreme Court ordered EPA to regulate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, Romney bashed this agency for doing so. He will strive for energy independence and wants to achieve it by drilling for oil everywhere and anywhere, except for the Florida Everglades. He is also for bringing oil from the Canadian tar sands to the U.S. via the Keystone KL pipeline.

While some of the candidates have changed their position on climate change, Rick Santorum has not. He has denied the existence of global warming for a long time, and he stands today with that position. He calls “climate change an absolute travesty of scientific research that was motivated by those who, in my opinion, saw this as an opportunity to create a panic and a crisis for government to be able to step in and even more greatly control your life.” With respect to energy, Santorum emphatically states that all subsidies should be eliminated so that all energy sources compete on an equal basis. Being from Pennsylvania, he is a big proponent of coal and is so in love with this fuel that he opposed EPA’s position to restrict mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants. He is in favor of drilling for gas and oil almost anywhere and is particularly enthusiastic about hydraulic fracturing or “fracking”, a process currently being used to drill for natural gas. This process requires huge quantities of water containing chemicals that could eventually, if not injected properly, migrate into the groundwater. While in the senate, he was one of the biggest recipients of campaign funding from the oil and gas industry – probably just a coincidence.

Now that you know something about the position of each of these four candidates relative to the environment and energy, unfortunately it doesn’t help much. It appears that these candidates either change their position from time to time, don’t walk the talk, or don’t know much about these issues. Unfortunately, a review of the candidates environmental and energy positions will not help anyone make a decision on the best president. Perhaps there are more important issues anyway.